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SUBJECT: WHAT WE CAN EXPECT FROM FRANCE IN AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. USNATO 610
[¶](#)B. PARIS 4534
[¶](#)C. PARIS 4522

Classified By: Political Officer Kimberly C. Krhounek for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[¶](#)1. (C) Summary. On November 7, President Sarkozy addressed the U.S. Congress and announced that France will "remain in Afghanistan for as long as it takes," marking a deepening commitment to Afghanistan under the Sarkozy presidency. Currently, the French Joint Staff is considering proposals for increasing France's contributions to Afghanistan -- an interest echoed in recent meetings at the MFA and Elysee (Presidency). There is now a window of opportunity to encourage increased French commitments to the ISAF mission if we can target our efforts to match French operational constraints and help address force protection issues. This cable contains our evaluation of the various deployment possibilities of French forces and support to Afghanistan, following the wish list recently sent by USNATO (ref A). End Summary.

[¶](#)2. (C) Among NATO Allies, France is second only to the US in number of forces deployed, with roughly 33,000 troops currently conducting missions overseas or stationed in overseas territories. Their largest deployments include Kosovo (1,959), Afghanistan (1,615), Lebanon (1,489), the Cote d'Ivoire (2,581), the Indian Ocean -- which includes support for Operation Enduring Force in Afghanistan in CTF 150 (279 on three ships), Chad (1248) and Djibouti (2,859). A planned EU mission to Chad is expected to deploy between 1,400 to 3,000 additional French troops and support personnel (ref B) by the end of this year. In addition, the defense white paper, the first major review of defense and security priorities for France since 1994, is underway and should be released in March 2008. Major decisions on budgets, operations and capabilities are not likely to be made until after the white paper is released. That said, there are some areas where we see possibilities to increase French engagement in Afghanistan, as follows.

ALPHABET SOUP: OMLT's and PRTs

[¶](#)3. (C) Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLT's) - France currently has three OMLT's already on the ground, two

deploying in December 2007, and one more deploying in August 2008. Five are (or will be) located in Regional Command East and one is promised to assist the Dutch in Uruzgan province in Regional Command South. The French find OMLTs attractive as they are small (20-50 people) and fit clearly with the French goal of enabling the Afghan National Army to become self-sufficient. However, the biggest issues likely to impact the French decision on deploying additional OMLT's are force protection and logistics support. Ensuring support for their own troops is a French priority; currently French teams are deployed in Wardak and Logar provinces where the French are able to provide logistics support without difficulty from their operating base in Kabul. The largest hurdle for them to overcome in deploying to other areas in Afghanistan remains the distance from their operating base. In fact, the French Joint Staff remains concerned by the serious challenges on their logistics resources posed by the political decision (taken by President Sarkozy himself) to deploy an OMLT in Uruzgan.

¶4. (C) Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) - Several recent high-level visitors, including USD/P Edelman and U/S Burns, have urged the French to establish a PRT, preferably in Nimroz province. This possibility is currently under consideration by the GOF. One difficulty in obtaining a possible French commitment to field a PRT is that the basic PRT structure, in which civilian agencies are subordinate to military control on the ground, violates the French institutional concept of civilian control over the military. The French military does however, have a long history (particularly in Africa) of taking on reconstruction elements in their military deployments, and we need to refer to this model when delivering our message. It may be easier to convince the French to deploy a purely military PRT with reconstruction elements rather than adopt a "whole government" approach in which civilian elements are subsumed under military control. This ideological resistance could be overcome by creative options on how the GOF could structure its PRT that would accomplish the PRT mission without blurring the civilian/military lines essential to French thinking. This is an area where the proposed visit of an interagency team from Washington could assist.

¶5. (C) Having answers for two additional practical concerns about deployment of a PRT in Nimroz province -- the sensitivity of French relations with Iran and overcoming infrastructure problems that impede support for a PRT there -- would enhance our probability of success. President Sarkozy and FM Kouchner are in close step with the USG on Iran and both have called publicly for stronger sanctions by the international community to address non-proliferation concerns there. French decision-makers are concerned that deploying military forces in Afghanistan near the Iranian border could further complicate the French-Iranian relationship. Nimroz province also lacks a functioning transportation infrastructure, which again would impede French support for their forces. USG assistance in building up the infrastructure in Nimroz (perhaps via a NATO common funding mechanism) could allay some of these concerns; or alternatively welcoming a French PRT in a different province could get them on board with a PRT, but avoid some of the issues impeding forward progress in Nimroz.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND A MANEUVER BATTALION

¶6. (C) Special Operations Forces - Until January 2007, approximately 250 French Special Forces operated in Afghanistan under Operation Enduring Freedom. We have been told that the possibility of a second deployment of Special Operations troops is under consideration by the Elysee (ref C). This option may be one of the most achievable, as it would be building on a successful past deployment rather than creating a new one with all of the attendant planning and preparations.

¶7. (C) Maneuver Battalion - The possibility of a maneuver

battalion is viable if it encompasses relocating the existing French battalion in Kabul to another province. France is hoping that a favorable capabilities assessment will permit a transfer of responsibility for the Capital Region Command from ISAF forces to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) o/a summer 2008. An ANSF takeover of the Kabul region would then permit the French to recommit their maneuver battalion to another region. If the ANSF is not deemed capable of assuming security control in Kabul, it is much less likely that France will deploy a second battalion to ISAF due to personnel constraints. French forces are being stretched to compensate for shortfalls in the proposed EU mission in Chad (ref B) and deployment of an additional maneuver battalion in Afghanistan would consume 3 to 4 times the number of battalion troops to assure the logistical support.

RW Aviation

¶8. (C) One of ISAF's most critical needs is for mission-capable rotary wing aviation replacements for departing USG helicopters. On July 30, SACEUR sent a letter to the GOF (as well as other NATO Allies) to ask for replacement helicopters to be deployed for ISAF. We understand the request for helicopter support will be the most difficult to obtain, based on our assessments of French helicopter capabilities. Of the 186 helicopters in the inventories of the three French services, only 14 (EC-725 Cougar) are capable of operating in Afghanistan and two of these are already there. The remaining EC-725 Cougars are dedicated to training crews and conducting special forces operations. No other French utility helicopters are capable of operating in the high altitudes and extreme temperatures of Afghanistan. The next generation French utility helicopter (NH-90) will not be fielded until 2011.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: The time is ripe to encourage additional French commitments to Afghanistan, and we will be most successful if we can do so in a way that takes into account French force protection and logistical support issues. With its commitment to remain in Afghanistan now reaffirmed by President Sarkozy, the GOF is looking at the long-term picture and wants to see more effectively coordinated and delivered support for Afghanistan's political and economic development by the international community (whether anchored in the UN or in some kind of Berlin-Process arrangement). French forces are currently feeling the pressure of being over-extended globally and they will be looking for the best places to deploy increasingly scarce resources. We can move this further along by targeting our requests for French deployments that can be self-sufficient (without relying on foreign forces for protection and support) and asking the GOF how we can help relieve them in other areas (for example, helping the French EU Mission to Chad with logistic support).

Finally, the defense white paper will set the priorities for French military spending and deployments and will play a vital role in the coming year, as will President Sarkozy himself, whose personal decision cut through the bureaucratic tape to deploy the OMLT in Uruzgan to assist the Dutch. END COMMENT.

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